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SUBJECT: WHITE NILE GOVERNOR DISCUSSES AGRICULTURE, ELECTIONS, AND  
NORTH-SOUTH TENSION

REF: A. Khartoum 1753

[1](#)B. Khartoum 1744

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: In a December 4 meeting with emboffs, the Governor of White Nile State, Dr. Mohammed Nur Al-Tigani, highlighted the importance of agriculture for Sudan, expressed confidence that mid-term elections would be conducted in a free, fair, and timely manner, and dismissed the existence of North-South tensions in his state. He also expressed hope for an improved bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Sudan. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) Al-Tigani described agriculture as the foundation of Sudan's economy. He noted that while sugar brings in the largest source of agricultural revenue, sesame, sorghum, cotton, wheat, sunflower, and hibiscus also have great potential in White Nile state. He noted that the Sudanese economy was more balanced before petroleum was exported, and said that the Sudanese economy will continue to grow even after its oil reserves are depleted. He said that leading officials in Khartoum also recognize that agriculture is the real source of sustainable development in Sudan, but that war and instability have shortened these officials' attention and turned their focus to oil.

[1](#)4. (U) Al-Tigani was optimistic that the Sudanese mid-term elections scheduled for 2009 will be conducted in a timely, free, and fair manner. He was not concerned that the census preceding the elections may be pushed back, saying, "Even if they don't complete the current census, they can use what they have and just build on the previous census." Al-Tigani said that he has balanced his loyalty to the National Congress Party with the need to respect all political parties in his state, saying, "We need to understand and recognize that the elections are a peaceful way to share power. Even if we do not win in the coming elections we'll remain active and positive as an opposition power until the following elections." Recalling an interview with CDA Fernandez on Al-Jazeera from November 7 (reftel A) Al-Tigani stated that the level of democracy in Sudan is not to be found anywhere in the Middle East and that the upcoming elections will prove this.

[1](#)5. (U) Al-Tigani stated that southerners and northerners live together in peace in White Nile State, and contended that even if the South secedes from the north in 2011, southerners will stay in his state and trade will continue to increase between the North and South. Al-Tigani noted that he halted North-South river transport on November 1 (reftel B) due to the increased presence of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA), claiming that SPLA troops moved inside White Nile's borders in early November and that many citizens were worried about the general state of security and stability in south White Nile State. Al-Tigani said the situation has now been resolved and dismissed claims that this temporary port closure was the north's way of "flexing its muscles" or showing that the north can control the economy of South Sudan.

[1](#)6. (U) Al-Tigani said he will focus his efforts in the next year on

developing two new cement factories in the Jabalain area, modernizing the electrical grid in anticipation of the opening of Meroe dam, and building new and dependable roads along the Nile. He said that his state will continue privatization initiatives, as the private sector has proven to be more effective than government at managing business. Al-Tigani also expressed hope that U.S.-Sudanese bilateral relationship will improve, saying "I'm optimistic. When sanctions are eventually lifted, we'll have more economic cooperation and this will drive our bilateral relationship. I look forward to the day when U.S. businesses will be in White Nile state."

17. (U) COMMENT: Al-Tigani appeared to be a moderate, optimistic, and generally benign figure. Although he may have little influence over key decision makers in Khartoum, he is a northern governor, who, at the very least, knows the right thing to say to Western diplomats on elections, agriculture, and U.S.-Sudanese relations. His comments on the long-term importance of agriculture, especially for the northern economy, are prescient given that the majority of oil reserves are in the South. END COMMENT.

FERNANDEZ